

St Mary's News

February 2021

(under Coronavirus lockdown)



Includes

The Great Return: Ready or Not - The Revd Tony Rindl

The Joy of the Lord is my strength – the Revd Josh Brocklesby

May God keep you and bless you ... - Cath Da Costa

Channel Migrants - Current Affairs Connect

... and more!

The Great Return - Ready or Not



I spent a profitable hour or so yesterday filling up my green wheelie bin with garden waste. Since we now pay for our garden waste to be collected there is an added incentive. However, it was not my only motivation. During lockdown I have come to appreciate more and more what a blessing the garden is and I am determined to make the most of it this

year and believe a little more effort at this stage will bring rewards later in the year. I am afraid it was more a case of tidying up than any attempt at serious gardening, but it was still a joy to discover snowdrops and other green shoots that signify winter is drawing to a close and spring is on its way. When I finished, I could see it is getting noticeably lighter in the evenings, another sure sign that spring is on its way. As I reflected on these observations and resolved to spend more time working in the garden, one thing is for sure, spring will come whether we are ready or not.

As we continue to endure the hard winter of this pandemic, knowing that we have all experienced difficulties and challenges and in some cases sickness and grief, we can now see some encouraging signs. As we see the vaccination programme roll out, and the infection rate drop and the number of new cases fall, (hopefully a significant reduction in the number of hospital admissions and deaths will follow) we can be reasonably optimistic that things will improve further. Perhaps it is rather reminiscent of the end of winter and the beginning of spring. Like the changing seasons the end of the pandemic and the return to 'normal' life will happen whether we are ready or not.

We all dream of returning to church, where the restrictions we are currently having to endure will be a thing of the past. It will happen, we will be able to gather in great numbers, we will be able to sing, and share the peace, have Communion together in one place sharing a common cup. It will feel like spring, and how we embrace it and to what extent we flourish as church

family and as individuals will depend largely on what we do now. Believe me all sorts of things can grow in an untended garden but if we want our favourite plants to flourish, flowers to bloom, and our vegetable patches to yield a bountiful harvest, that will depend largely on the work we do now, and the same principles apply to our church.

Do you remember the joy and delight of returning to our newly refurbished church after months of worshipping week by week in our church centre? We were amazed at the transformation, and it was the product of many years of planning and preparation, followed by many months of intense building work. Most of that work was done behind closed doors hidden from sight, and then the day came for the Great Return and we could see the transformation for ourselves. It was a sight to behold and every bit as good as any makeover programme we have ever seen on television.

As we imagine what that Great Return to church will look like this time round perhaps it won't be so much about the refurbishment of the church building but more about the people, or to use the technical term, the reordering of God's people. Back in our gardens and in the public parks as we observe the snowdrops



and green shoots appearing, we know that during these winter months things have been happening out of sight and we now begin to see them emerge out of the ground. I believe God has also been at work in each one of us during the 'winter' of this pandemic. At times it will have been challenging, and we might not recognise in ourselves any obvious development.

In last month's newsletter I reflected on how Lent this year will not only coincide with spring and the lengthening of days, but hopefully the easing of restrictions caused by the pandemic. I suggested just as Lent is seen as a time of preparation for Easter and the celebration of resurrection, so it could also be used as preparation for new life beyond the pandemic.

I am sure we have all done our reflecting and searching after meaning during lockdown. I think it is important that over the next few weeks as many of us as possible can come together to share our thoughts and ideas and to study together what God might be saying to us and how this might prepare us for the Great Return as we enter a new season in the life of St. Mary's, one where all might flourish.

Cath, Josh and I have put together a bespoke Lent study course, which ideally is designed to be used in small groups but can be accessed individually. Each session provides a time for...



- Welcome and catch up
- A short reflection from Tony, Josh or Cath on the topic for that week
- Use of videos and other material to enrich discussions
- A chance to discuss and share your ideas so that we can learn and journey together
- Prayer
- Resources for you to take away and use during the week

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages us to come together to pray and to study and to encourage one another:

Discover creative ways to encourage others and to motivate them toward acts of compassion, doing beautiful works as expressions of love. This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together, as some have formed the habit of doing, because we need each other! In fact, we should come together even more frequently, eager to encourage and urge each other onward as we anticipate that day dawning

(Hebrews 10:24-25)

The course content is still in the production line and we are putting together the finishing touches, but the main themes will be:

Overall Outline for 6 week course: Session 1: Where to begin?

Session 2: Where do we find God?

Session 3: Who am I now?

Session 4: What do I dream of?

Session 5: How do we respond?

Session 6: How do we start rebuilding?

It is intended the Great Return Course will commence the week beginning 22nd February and will run right through to Holy Week. I do hope as many people will join us as possible. Please look out for details of how you can join existing connect groups or join especially created groups for this course. Even if you haven't been part of a connect group before, now is an opportunity to join us. Soon a new day will dawn, and we will enter a new season whether we are ready or not. Now is the time to come together in preparation so that we might all flourish in the springtime of life beyond the pandemic.

The Revd Tony Rindl





The Joy of the Lord is my strength

A couple of weeks back I preached about our need to be people of joy and how joy can be in our heart along with all the other emotions we might feel. It is a deep embedded gift of God which is there to sustain us through difficult times and enhance our appreciation and experience of the gifts we have in life. This is because joy is not an overpowering emotion. Having joy does not mean we will never be sad or grieve or mourn! We will still have those things and experience those things in life's journey, but joy can accompany them and help us eventually to a place where we can see light where before it felt like there was only darkness.

Since that sermon I have been drawn to a line in the book of Nehemiah where we have the verse...

"The Joy of the Lord is your strength"

The book of Nehemiah is about the return of the Israelites from exile. A people who knew and experienced pain and suffering. Indeed, in our Lent course we will be exploring and journeying with much of the narrative of the Exiles. And so, when Nehemiah ushers these words while talking about a feast day to God, he does not do so lightly. He and the people have been through so much yet despite all that they have gone through Nehemiah knows where his strength comes. It was the joy of the Lord that sustained them and gave them strength through all the hardships of Exile. And that joy which had remained with them would now be expressed in a feast and a party. I think there is something profound in that. The Joy of the Lord can be our strength in life. And the moments of joy we have, and experience can



sustain us through times where happiness has escaped us. Things of this life will constantly change but God remains steadfast!

It was a lovely surprise that on the Sunday I was preaching about joy that there was snow falling outside! I have to say I had not looked at the weather forecast and so that morning as the snow began to fall it was a beautiful gift

especially given - I love snow! I think my love of it probably stems back to the joy of those very rare snow days when the snow was enough for school to be cancelled. So not only did you get an extra day off, but you also had snow outside to play in! Those are some very happy memories. And that happiness and joy continues for me as an adult. I may not play so much in it but there is something about how the snow makes all seem new which I love. My garden, very much a work in progress and littered with Mo's attempts to help (dig holes) has never looked better than when covered in snow. I think it is a gift to be able to see the place you are in, in a completely new light. Nothing of what is around you has really changed and yet everything around you looks and feels different. And so, with everything in lockdown seeming so similar it was lovely for the view out of the window to be so transformed!

But the biggest joy of the snow came in seeing how much Mo (my 1-year old Labrador) enjoyed his first experience in it. We videoed his reaction which you can see on Facebook at the beginning of the video for the Evening Service on 31st January – link here



https://fb.watch/3qfk]9Fj1Z/. In the clip Mo simply runs wildly around the garden, a run he does when he is overcome with excitement. We call it zooming, when his response is simply to zoom around due to excitement and joy, it is all he can do to express himself! What you don't see in the short clip is how long his excited running goes on for which is a long time! It was beautiful to experience and a memory I will forever hold. And the joy of that moment is one which I will carry with me. It will be one I remind myself of when I find that sock I'd been looking for chewed through or when Mo comes back from a muddy walk and jumps on the sofa before I've been able to clean him. It is easier to forgive him when you remember the joy he brings! And I will remind myself of it, when times are tough, remembering that life will have more of these memories, more moments of joy and happiness. It's easier to keep going with hope for better times when

we remember the better days we have already been gifted! The darkness cannot overcome the light.

And so even though I'd been longing for snow for over a year it did finally come, and it was a gift which will sustain me till whenever the next one is! In a similar way Joy is a Gift of God which can sustain us throughout life even when moments of happiness feel distant!

"The Joy of the Lord is my strength"

The Revd Josh Brocklesby





'Worry does not empty tomorrow of sorrow; but it empties today of strength.'

- Corrie Ten Boom

May God keep you and bless you

even in these difficult times

How can it already be February?! I don't know about you, but it seems the greatest irony that while lockdown seems to be dragging, I keep finding whole chunks of time have passed me by without me being aware of it.

Last month I asked you 'How are you?' Speaking to those around me, I think for many of us our overwhelming feeling is one of exhaustion. Between not really getting a chance to take a proper break over Christmas – both physically and emotionally – where we could relax with our loved ones and reset - the relentless strain of the unknown and working / living in a way that is often taking twice as much energy, we are running on empty. In many ways this lockdown feels almost more difficult – on one hand we have the tantalising hope with the roll out of the vaccine but with no set end in sight we do not want to build our hopes up again only to get them dashed. January, which is traditionally a difficult month for so many, seems even more of a slog. 'Spring' in all its analogies cannot come soon enough!

Yet as with all things with God, it has not been a time totally without its rays of light. For many it has been a time when we can point to many blessings God has put in place to help and support us through it all – we only have to think about how technology has helped us to keep connected. This



is of course not true for all, but what is heartening is how people have stepped up in reaching out and looking after each other. For years I have heard people bemoan the breakdown in neighbourliness, but I have watched in delight how during this time of COVID people have taken the risk to reach out, have broken down barriers of reserve and taken time to chat, to contact people, to join conversations, to reach out to neighbours and really make a difference in others' lives.

For so many of us we have found that this time in the 'wilderness' has been a time in which we have often been surprised with how formative it has

been – how it has helped us to take a deep, honest look at our lives and to realise the changes we would like to make. I am sure like me for years you have been aware of things you aren't completely happy with but let's face it, it usually takes a crisis to really get us to make that change. There is much to be said about how we instinctively hold onto our comfort zones and how this prevents us reaching out towards change.

As we go into the time of Lent, it struck me that it is – as Tony said in his January magazine article - an opportunity for us as Christians and people to do a personal MOT. It made me think about how more and more I am finding myself teaching the children in my classes, mindfulness. This



Mind Full, or Mindful?

may cause you as a Christian a moment of concern because this is often seen as a more Buddhist concept, but like all things it depends on how you put these ideas into practice. 'Mindfulness' is defined by the dictionary as: 'the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something' or 'a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique.' In other words, 'mindfulness' has to do with gaining 'self-awareness'. In a world where we were seeing a significant rise in mental health issue in our children and particularly youth even before the advent of COVID, this is quite a concern. The same can be said about adults – and COVID has only heightened this with the accompanying stress – for many there has been illness and bereavement to deal with too – taken altogether it is no wonder we are feeling the effects of trauma.

A couple of years ago I went through a particularly difficult time of depression – in hindsight I can now see that God was using this time to form and mould me: He broke down walls I had built up around myself; He countered the lies the world had taught me and helped me to see myself as He sees me as someone of value, someone precious and worthwhile; in short God helped me to embrace the person He made me to be and to step out in obedience and faith into the future He was holding out in front of me. I may see the benefits now, but at the time it was very painful. The greatest

thing I learnt was that I no longer had to pretend everything was okay – that rather than seeing times of depression and anxiety as weakness, I learnt that these were opportunities for God to work in my life. My counsellor at the time said something that made a real impact – she told me to step back and to try and understand why I was feeling what I was. I learnt that rather than shutting down, I needed to seek help and work at understanding what really lay behind my feelings of low self-esteem and the other thoughts I was having; to overcome that which was causing the emotions, feelings or at times the 'absence of feeling' which I was experiencing.

It reminded me of what the 19th Century Psychologist William James once said: "I am sad because I cry" – how often do we find ourselves reacting in some way, generally in sadness or anger, but not really sure why? It is easy to just put any label to our emotions, but not so easy to dig a bit deeper – to understand what is going on beneath and ultimately to learn to deal with what we are going through. Added to that, like many who experience depression, in my self-destructive moments I found myself almost relishing in not caring for myself such as skipping meals, or I found my sleep disrupted.

Our bodies and minds are so intimately linked - I am sure we are all aware that if we have not had enough sleep, we are prone to being more jumpy and even anxious; that if we do not eat properly or are physically tired, we tend to be more short-tempered which can in turn affect our relationships with people. I came to realise that as I offered myself in obedience to what God had called me to do, I had to ensure I was prepared to do the work He placed in front of me - I couldn't be fully present if I was feeling faint because I had forgotten to eat lunch; I could not give suitable pastoral care if I was over-emotional myself. I also learnt how if we are more self-aware, we can trick our bodies into self-regulating more - effectively countering our emotions with physical actions. For example, anxiety causes our testosterone and other 'flight / fight' hormones to spike - this causes our body to think we are faced with a danger it needs to get away from and we find that our heart rate escalates, our breathing becomes more rapid, we feel clammy, etc, which in turn makes us feel more anxious. It can help, therefore, if we try to counter these physical reactions - for example deep

breathing and relaxation techniques can help us to lower our breathing, heartrate and the anxiety hormones washing our bodies; visualisation techniques and the use of pressure points can help interrupt the thoughts that are causing the anxiety in the first place.

In short, becoming more aware of what we are feeling and what causes these feelings can help. I found the following chart very helpful – it helped me to analyse and group what I was feeling so that I could use the coping strategies I had learnt to the best advantage – but maybe more importantly I knew when to seek help!

Thriving "I got this."	Surviving "Something isn't right."	Struggling "I can't keep this up."	In Crisis "I can't survive this."
Calm and steady with minor mood fluctuations Able to take things in stride Consistent performance Able to take feedback and to adjust to changes of plans Able to focus Able to communicate effectively Normal sleep patterns and appetite	Nervousness, sadness, increased mood fluctuations Inconsistent performance More easily overwhelmed or irritated Increased need for control and difficulty adjusting to changes Trouble sleeping or eating Activities and relationships you used to enjoy seem less interesting or even stressful Muscle tension, low energy, headaches	Persistent fear, panic, anxiety, anger, pervasive sadness, hopelessness Exhaustion Poor performance and difficulty making decisions or concentrating Avoiding interaction with coworkers, family, and friends Fatigue, aches and pains Restless, disturbed sleep Self-medicating with substances, food, or other numbing activities	Disabling distress and loss of function Panic attacks Nightmares or flashbacks Unable to fall or stay asleep Intrusive thoughts Thoughts of self-harm or suicide Easily enraged or aggressive Careless mistakes an inability to focus Feeling numb, lost, or out of control Withdrawl from relationships Dependence on substances, food, or other numbing activities to cope

Adapted from: Watson, P., Gist, R., Taylor, V. Evlander, E., Leto, F., Martin, R., Vaught, D., Nash, W.P., Westphal, R., & Litz, B. (2013). Stress First Aid for Firefighters and Emergency Services Personnel. National Fallen Firefighters Foundation.

There are many sources on the internet where you can research coping strategies – I have placed a few links below, but there may be times when you just need to seek support. Everyone at one time or another will experience a time when things become too much, and they may experience anxiety or depression or maybe even both. If things are too much and the support of friends and family is not enough, please do seek a professional – let's face it you wouldn't hesitate to go to a doctor for medical advice so why hesitate going just because it is an emotional or mental issue? Speaking to someone may be the first step and while I have to stress that Tony, Josh and I are not mental health experts, we do offer a non-judgemental and listening ear. Please do reach out to someone if you need to – you do not need to suffer through this alone.

Links:

- For helplines: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/
- https://www.mind.org.uk/
- Anxiety | Every Mind Matters | One You (www.nhs.uk)
- https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/how-to-cope-with-anxiety
- https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/depression-anxiety-mental-health

What are we planning for this Lent for Children and Families at St Mary's?

Keep an eye out for more information and links in the newsletters as we are planning some very exciting upcoming events:

- 14th February in place of our usual KidsChurch we will be having a Valentines / Pancake themed activity hour from 3.30 to 4.30pm.
- This year the adults will be doing a Lent course so that we don't miss out, we will also be following the Lent course! For children

aged 9 and younger we will be following the same themes as in the Lent course in our **KidsChurch sessions on Sundays at 4pm**. We will also be putting up a *weekly sheet of activities*, *fun and games* to accompany the sessions up on St Mary's Watford website and on the St Mary's Watford Children and Family Facebook page. We will also be practicing some special *songs for Easter!*

- If you are 10 or older, why not join our **Bravers' session on Thursdays at 6 7pm** where we will be doing a suitably adapted version of the Lent course.
- During Lent we will be running a Woman's only Lent session so if you are only the age of 16, a woman and would like to join us please do speak to myself or Cathy H. You would be very welcome!

As ever, if you would like more information about any of the things we are doing in St Mary's Children and Families or would just like to chat, please do give me a call or message me.

May God keep you and bless you even in these difficult times.

God Bless

Cath da Costa (07961564382 /

 $\underline{familyworker.stmaryswatford@gmail.com})$





World Day of Prayer

A Different Day – 4th November 2020 – it was preparation day for the World Day of Prayer; in these strange times this was done on Zoom. A new experience for me. I went round to a Committee member of the Watford Churches representative.



What an interesting morning – on Zoom about thirty ladies both Watford Committee members and other ladies from churches around Hertfordshire.

This year the World Day of Prayer is being hosted by **St Mary's Church**, Watford, **our** Church.

The service will be on Friday 5th March via Zoom. This year it has been written by the Christian ladies of Vanuatu. What an interesting group of islands in the Pacific Ocean, off the coasts of Australia and New Zealand. We saw a film of the islands; lovely sandy beaches, palm trees, bright lovely flowers – a lush island. But on one of the islands is an active volcano; a few years ago, it gave so much disruption that the people had to be evacuated from the island. Also there have been two cyclones in the last few years.

The islands played a part in World War II as there was an American encampment there – giving rise to the film 'South Pacific'.

Often people leave the island to work in Australia or New Zealand.

We then went through parts of the service, practicing one or two of the hymns – the ones written by the ladies from Vanuatu.

Each year the World Day of Prayer service is written by Christian ladies of different countries and in 2022 it will be the turn of ladies in England and Ireland.

Rosemary Clemas

Current Affairs Connect:

Ministerial Reply about Channel Migrants



The summer of 2020 saw record numbers of migrants crossing the Channel from France with some 5,600 making the journey up to September. That month the Current Affairs Connect Group discussed the issue under the title Channel Migrants: What is the Christian response? We concluded that we were very concerned about their treatment by the UK authorities and, with the Vicar's agreement, wrote on 21 September to the MP for Watford, Dean Russell as follows:

We are writing to request better treatment for the migrants crossing the Channel this summer, in particular that the Government provides safe, legal routes for them.

To explain, we are members of St Mary's Church on Watford High Street who meet to discuss the impact of Judeo-Christian principles, upon which the laws of Britain are broadly founded, on current affairs. In the case of migrants, these principles have historically resulted in Britain's liberal, welcoming approach to people from places such as the Caribbean, Kenya, Uganda and, following your predecessor's initiative while Minister for Refugees, Syria. It is an approach we follow in St Mary's where we have been privileged to welcome several Iranian refugees in recent times who have greatly enriched our wonderfully diverse faith community.

The migrants crossing the Channel are mostly fleeing war torn, chaotic countries and risk their lives to land on our shores. They seek asylum and choose Britain due to its international language and its many ethnic communities which offer support and, especially in the case of unaccompanied children, they wish to be reunited with close family already here. They use the routes they do because it is not possible to claim asylum without landing here.

First, we are concerned at the level of fear and hatred of migrants. There have been reports of people attacking migrants as they land in Britain and of asylum seekers being harassed by Britain First in a Birmingham hotel. We consider the Government could do much more to counter this through explaining, for example, that the numbers are small in terms of overall net immigration and that immigrants, such as the Home Secretary's own family, contribute significantly to the economy and the nation once established. In particular, we feel that the language sometimes used by the Government or its MPs, such as "Clandestine Channel Threat Commander" and the description of migrants as "illegal" people who are "asylum shopping" and "queue jumping" panders to and encourages that fear and hatred, whether or not intended. It is not illegal to apply for asylum nor is there any requirement under international law for a person to do so in the first safe country in which they land.

Secondly, given the significant percentage of unaccompanied children seeking asylum, there is an urgent need to reconsider the arbitrary cap of 480 imposed on the Dubs amendment which the Government announced on 27 July it had met. Lord Dubs has explained that the cap was set on the basis that this was the maximum number of places local authorities could find when in fact they have offered over 1,400 places.

Thirdly, we are surprised at the statement of Chris Philp, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office, in Parliament on 2 September that people fleeing war and poverty in their homelands would not be offered safe and lawful routes to the UK. This is not in line with our British humanitarian values which we gave to the world through a number of international conventions in the aftermath of World War II. Further, the Government has stated that it wants to reduce people smuggling. The provision of safe and lawful routes would be a way to do so. Moreover, a large and possibly unnecessary amount of resources seems to be taken up in preventing migration to the UK. What analysis has taken place to cost the use of the Border Force and armed forces in this work against the economic and social benefits of mostly young immigrants coming to the UK where they use their professions and skills and pay taxes?

We appreciate that no single country can accommodate every refugee. Nevertheless, a more humanitarian approach could be achieved working together with other European countries both to take them in and deal with the underlying, long term causes. (The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants has set out a number of recommendations which we attach at the Annex). We feel strongly that Britain should not stand by with an island fortress mentality while the world's most vulnerable children, like 16-year old Abdulfatah Hamdallah from Sudan, are washed up on beaches.

We should be grateful if you could ask the Home Secretary to address our concerns.

Dean Russell undertook to put our concerns to Ministers in the Home Office and, on 18 December, Chris Philp replied as follows:

The UK has a proud record of providing protection for people who need it, for as long as it is needed, in accordance with our obligations under The Refugee

Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights. However, there is no provision within our immigration rules for someone to be allowed to travel to the UK to seek asylum or temporary refuge. Whilst we sympathise with people in difficult

situations, we are not bound to consider asylum claims from the very large numbers of people overseas who might like to come here. Those who need international protection should claim asylum in the first safe country they reach - that is the fastest route to safety.

Your constituents refer to a statement I made in Parliament on 2 September that people fleeing war and poverty would not be offered safe and legal routes to the UK. May I take this opportunity to clarify what I said, which was safe routes from Europe are not the answer to this problem because, by definition, people in Europe are already in a safe country. The UK's longstanding policy has been to not participate in relocation within Europe. Instead, the UK's resettlement schemes have provided safe and legal routes, direct from conflict regions, for tens of thousands of people in greatest need of protection.

I would like to highlight the long history the UK has of supporting refugees and we are one of the world's leading refugee resettlement states. Our resettlement schemes have provided safe and legal routes for tens of thousands of people who have been given the chance to start new lives in safety. Since 2015 the UK has resettled more than 25,000 refugees, more than any other country in Europe. We can be proud as a country of our ambitious commitments and achievements.

I am very sorry for the tragic loss of life in the channel and my thoughts are with those bereaved. These tragic events highlight the danger to life from Channel crossings and other types of clandestine entry and the need to stop callous criminals exploiting vulnerable people. I make no apology for my determination to make the use of small boats to cross the channel an unviable option for reaching the UK.

I would also like directly address Mary's Church members' concerns about hate crimes towards migrants and asylum seekers including hotels and arrival the UK. We will not tolerate any individuals or groups who spread hate, demonising those of other faiths or ethnicities or that spread myths about immigration to stoke up fear,

deliberately raising community tensions by bringing disorder and violence to our towns and cities.

The wellbeing and safety our service users is of the utmost importance and we are monitoring the situation and working closely with the police, as well as our providers, to ensure the safeguarding of the supported population, particularly those currently accommodated hotels. Extremists, such as right-wing extremists, seek to justify behaviour that contradicts and undermines our shared values through their use hateful narratives which spread lies and stoke tensions. Your constituents draw attention to the number of unaccompanied children crossing the Channel to be reunited with family in the UK. There are already number safe and legal routes for children in Europe join family in the UK; however, building on these, during the passage of the Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Act 2020 Act') the Government made several important commitments that demonstrate the priority it places on protecting people, including unaccompanied children.

Firstly, we are committed, in the event non-negotiated outcome with the EU, to seek to pursue new bilateral negotiations on post-transition migration issues with key countries with which it shares mutual interest. This will include negotiations for new arrangements for the family reunion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Secondly, the Government is committed to conduct a review of safe and legal routes to the UK for asylum-seekers, refugees and their families.

The Government also introduced important statutory commitments in Section 3 of the Act, specifically to:

1. conduct a review of legal routes by which protection claimants who are in the EU can enter the UK - including for family reunion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children;

- 2. publicly consult on legal routes for family reunion for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the EU:
- 3. lay a statement providing further detail of the aforementioned review and consultation before Parliament, within three months of the Act achieving Royal Assent; and
- 4. prepare a report on the outcome of the review, publish that report and lay that report before Parliament.

Given the Act's scope as a piece of EU withdrawal legislation, the Government's amendment was required to focus on those in EU Member States. However, we will review legal routes for asylumseekers, refugees and their families from all countries, not just EU Member States. This is in line with our new, global approach to the future immigration system.

Regarding the 'Dubs Scheme', in 2016, the UK committed to a one-off relocation of 480 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) from Europe to the UK under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016. The specified number of 480 is based on what local authorities told us they could offer. The consultation exercise which arrived at the number has been through the Courts and was found to be lawful. We have now met this commitment and stand ready to offer advice and guidance to those developing their own schemes. Any new scheme for the relocation of unaccompanied children to the UK from EU states would be extremely challenging to deliver, not least because of the pressures already faced by local authorities who are currently caring for over 5,000 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children - an increase of 146% since 2014. In September alone, nearly 2,000 people arrived in the UK by small boat, including many UASC, and that is stretching our ability to cope with UASC and asylum seekers to the breaking point.

As the Home Secretary said at the Conservative Party Conference, we are developing plans to reform our illegal migration and asylum

policies to ensure that we are able to provide protection to those who need it whilst preventing abuse of the system and the criminality associated with it.

I trust this addresses your constituents' concerns. Thank you for sight of the recommendations put forward by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, which were attached as an annex and have been duly noted.

Marcus Jones

This picture is taken from a book by the British artist *Charlie Mackesy* – '*The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*'. Many people have found the pictures and short reflections in this book helpful during the past year.



Services

We are sorry that the church building is closed once again.

We will continue to pray, worship and care for each other from our homes during this difficult time.

Sunday

10.30 am Morning Service via Zoom;4.00 pm KidsChurch via Zoom;5.30 pm Reflection via Facebook

Wednesday

12.30 pm Reflection via Facebook

Monday to Saturday

Morning Prayer via the Church website

Please keep up to date with what is on offer via our Facebook page or the website www.stmaryswatford.org

Who's Who at St Mary's

(They all continue to be available via the phone or online)

Vicar

The Revd Tony Rindl | 01923 225189 / 07792 505480 tonyrindl.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Curate

The Revd Joshua Brocklesby | 07764 738596 jbrocklesby.stmaryswatford@gmail.com

Churchwardens

Alison Saunders | 01923 244390 Peter Dean | 07876 154387

Children & Families Worker

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